

# **The Franciscan Capuchin Brotherhood as an Example of Consecrated Communion**

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## **Introduction**

As both her history and dogma show, the Church has always been aware that she is the community of the Risen Lord. Starting from the first portrait of the primitive Christian community as shown in chapter 2 in the book of the Acts of the Apostles till the present day models of Church, one can see a whole series of expressions of ecclesial communion, among which one of the most privileged, powerful and ancient expression is undoubtedly the fraternal communion of consecrated life. This demonstrates that ecclesial and consecrated communion not only predate the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood, but are also its inspiration, life and goal.

In view of such understanding two questions need to be clarified. First, what vision does the Church give to the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood in her pronouncements on consecrated life? Second, how has that vision been taken up, assimilated and lived by the Capuchin fraternity? In order to address these questions, this article, which is also a part of the author's Licentiate dissertation entitled *The Franciscan Capuchin Charism of Brotherhood*, is being divided in two parts. In the first part, a brief and concise presentation of the Church's vision of the concept of brotherhood within the context of consecrated life will be given. In the second part, the author will be giving concrete proposals as to how this ideal of consecrated communion can be lived within the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood.

### **1.1 The Magisterial vision of brotherhood within consecrated life**

After a deeper look at the major magisterial documents which authoritatively speak about consecrated life, three aspects of fraternal life come to the fore: (i) a divine brotherhood (ii) a brotherhood of fraternal love; and (iii) a brotherhood of mission. It is appropriate to delve deeper into these three characteristics.

### 1.1.1 *A divine brotherhood*

From its inception, consecrated life has always started as a result of a divine initiative, a call from the above. One of the best ways of how this call can be made tangible is precisely through fraternity. In itself, such a divine brotherhood is Trinitarian, Christological and Pneumatological.

#### 1.1.1.1 *A Trinitarian brotherhood*

Any consecrated brotherhood is essentially Trinitarian since the three divine persons are actively involved in its planning, calling, formation and mission. What is special in this community is that of being “a true family [it is] gathered together in the Lord’s name ... through the love of God which is poured into their [members’] hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5, 5).”<sup>1</sup>

This brotherhood knows its origins from the “initiative [that comes] wholly from the Father (see Jn 15, 16)”<sup>2</sup> who asks from those whom he calls to love him with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their might.<sup>3</sup> The Father always calls those whom he wishes to consecrate to himself through his Consecrated One, his Son Jesus Christ. By their total surrender to the Father in answering to the call of the Son, they let themselves be led by “an explicit desire to be totally conformed to him”<sup>4</sup> It is the Spirit who seduces, “shapes and moulds the hearts”<sup>5</sup> and minds of those who are chosen by the Father to configure their entire existence on the one and perfect image of the invisible God, Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, a community of consecrated people is in itself an icon and witness of the Trinity. It was the latter who originated, shaped and commissioned the consecrated brotherhood to be a witness of that communion in which sharing and participation “can change human relationships and create a new type of solidarity”.<sup>7</sup> The *communio trinitatis* opens the community up for others by making it a brotherhood of *sequela Christi*.

1. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* (28 October 1965), 15.

2. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 17.

3. See Dt 6, 5.

4. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 18.

5. *Ibid.*, 19.

6. See Col 1, 15.

7. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 41.

### 1.1.1.2 *A Christological brotherhood*

Since consecrated life itself is a life deeply rooted and lived in the example and teaching of Christ the Lord,<sup>8</sup> it fashions any consecrated community “in the image of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense one can qualify the consecrated brotherhood as being a christological one. The whole community is a witness of each member’s undivided commitment to the Lord. It is precisely this love for Christ which leads the brotherhood to be more intimate with him.<sup>10</sup> Hence, the whole formation project in consecrated life can be seen as “a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father”.<sup>11</sup> Christ becomes the focus, the one and only model towards whom the community moves. It is him whom it strives to imitate.

An authentic Christological brotherhood also takes care of the human development of its members. This is so since Jesus Christ is both God and man. In other words, the consecrated community essentially tends towards a healthy development of the human person.<sup>12</sup> Thanks to the lifestyle of the evangelical counsels, each member can explore, appreciate and educate his and her capability to love, precisely by self-mastering the destructive inclinations of possession, the seeking of pleasure, and the need to dominate, through a lifestyle of mutual self-giving and communion of life in Christ.

The more the brotherhood gives witness to the fact that it is a “fraternity and communion in the unity of one heart and one soul (see Acts 4, 32),”<sup>13</sup> the more Christ’s message of love of God and neighbour becomes visible and possible to live. In such a community, the Spirit is very much pleased since he blows where he chooses.<sup>14</sup>

### 1.1.1.3 *A Pneumatological brotherhood*

The consecrated brotherhood is pneumatological precisely when it is inspired, guided and kept together by the Holy Spirit. Within this brotherhood, the Spirit’s

8. See *ibid.*, 1.

9. *Ibid.*, 14.

10. See *ibid.*, 21.

11. *Ibid.*, 65.

12. See CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community* (2 February 1994), 35.

13. *Ibid.*, 9.

14. See Jn 3, 8.

role is decisive. It is the Spirit who inspires and bestows the charisms needed in a community to be an authentic witness to the Gospel of love and communion.<sup>15</sup> It is the Spirit, the perennial source of life, who brings to completion the mission of Christ via the many charisms, which he causes to arise at the very heart of the consecrated brotherhood.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it is the Spirit who is the principal educator of the consecrated fraternity. He fulfils this important role within the community by “fashion[ing] in the heart [of each member] the inner attitudes of the Son”.<sup>17</sup> The best attitude the Spirit can ever instil in the hearts of consecrated people is surely fraternal love.

### 1.1.2 *A brotherhood of fraternal love*

Fraternal love is the basis of an authentic community that has chosen Christ to be its focus. This sublime ideal can be realised when, thanks to the love of God poured in their hearts via the *Spiritus amoris*, consecrated people let themselves become an ecclesial, eucharistic, and fraternal brotherhood.

#### 1.1.2.1 *An Ecclesial brotherhood*

One of the main biblical sources for the foundation of communitarian consecrated life is undoubtedly that of Acts 2, 44-47. In this passage there is an example of communitarian consecration to Jesus Christ within the set up of the *ecclesia*. It may be said that the Church itself is the context whereby a consecrated brotherhood can come into existence, is nourished, and commissioned for the Lord’s mission and most of all is kept one in Christ. The reason for such a dynamic is that both the Church and consecrated life know their origin from the Trinitarian *koinonia*. Like the Church, the consecrated brotherhood is “a people brought into unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.<sup>18</sup> As the Church is the Church of the Trinity, also the brotherhood is the *brotherhood of the Trinity*.

The best way of how the consecrated fraternity can witness and preserve the communion with Mother Church is by affectionately showing its devotion and love to the Successor of Peter, and the Bishop in whose diocese the community is

15. See POPE JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 64.

16. See *ibid.*, 111.

17. CICLSAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium* (19 May 2002), 15.

18. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 4.

living and carrying out its activity of evangelisation. Since consecrated brotherhood can really make an impact on the people of God and those of good will when it is in full harmony with Mother Church, “cooperation between consecrated persons and Bishops for the organic development of diocesan pastoral life”<sup>19</sup> becomes a necessity. It is when such a fraternal and mutual cooperation between consecrated persons and the ecclesial pastors is indeed taking place that the people of God can really benefit from the fruitful apostolic activity and communitarian presence of consecrated fraternities. For this matter it is very important that both seminarians and consecrated post-novices, during their initial formation programmes, be given the appropriate knowledge and training so that they can better understand the mutual great gifts of consecrated life and the particular Church.<sup>20</sup>

The Church finds its life, identity and mission in the Eucharist. If a consecrated community is truly ecclesial it needs to recognise that the Eucharist “is the summit toward which [its] activity ... is directed; ... the fount from which all [its] power flows”.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.1.2.2 *A Eucharistic brotherhood*

Following the example of the primitive Christian community of Jerusalem,<sup>22</sup> consecrated brotherhood has sought to put the eucharistic celebration at the centre of its life and mission.<sup>23</sup> The eucharistic sacrifice is certainly the “richest of [the] sources”<sup>24</sup> that are available for any consecrated community. It is the source and summit of fraternal life.<sup>25</sup> It weaves the spiritual bonds of the brotherhood, making it one heart, one body and one soul in the body and blood of Christ.

19. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 48.

20. See CICLESAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 60.

21. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (4 December 1963), 10.

22. See Ac 2, 44-47.

23. For instance the document *Starting Afresh from Christ* states that “for many years now, ... the celebration of the Eucharist [has] assumed a central position in the life of all types of communities and of fraternities, once again giving them a biblical and ecclesial vigour,” CICLESAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 25

24. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*, 6. The same number of *Perfectae Caritatis* notes that consecrated persons “should [celebrate] the sacred liturgy, especially the holy mystery of the Eucharist, with their hearts and lips, according to the mind of the Church, and they should nourish their spiritual lives from this richest of sources.”

25. See VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 11. If consecrated life is ecclesial, it necessarily originates and finds its fulfilment in the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice.

It is Christ himself who, in his self-giving to the eucharistic synaxis, makes of the consecrated brotherhood a “house and a school of communion”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the eucharistic meal is a therapeutic meeting whereby the old sinful self is crucified on the cross of Christ so that the new self will rise with the Risen Lord. The more the Eucharist is celebrated with a devout, fully conscious and active participation<sup>27</sup> the more the members of the community immerse themselves in a “progressive [process of] taking on the attitude of Christ”<sup>28</sup> – an attitude of total self-giving to the Father and to one another.

Together with the eucharistic celebration both the viaticum and the eucharistic adoration are of an immense help in the building up of a eucharistic brotherhood.<sup>29</sup> Through these two means, the heart of the consecrated brotherhood is open to let the Spirit interiorise in it the heart and the mind of Christ. Since sitting at the Lord’s feet and listening to what he says<sup>30</sup> is essential in putting on Christ, it makes a lot of sense to have an oratory in the house wherein the Eucharist is celebrated and adored. Such a place automatically conveys the message that the body and blood of Christ are the heart of the community.<sup>31</sup>

The *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* are to be incarnated in the *lex vivendi*. There is no better way, how the Eucharist is celebrated and adored fraternally other than becoming a way of life through an unconditional fraternal love.

### 1.1.2.3 A brotherhood of fraternal love

A brotherhood which has interiorised the eucharistic habitus is one whereby its members ceaselessly seek to wash each other’s feet. In a nutshell, it is a brotherhood

26. CICLSAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 25. The consecrated community is challenged, as the Church herself is challenged in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* to be “the home and the school of communion”. See POPE JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 43.

27. See VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14.

28. CICLSAL, Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 15. *Vita Consecrata* explains the same idea when it states: “Formation is a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father.” POPE JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

29. See CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 14.

30. See Lk 10, 39.

31. The second part of canon 608 states that “each house is to have at least an oratory, in which the Eucharist is celebrated and reserved, so that it may truly be the centre of the community”.

“where the daily and patient passage from ‘me’ to ‘us’ takes place.”<sup>32</sup> Life in community offers a golden opportunity to consecrated persons to learn how to be faithful to the Lord and one another in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love and honour all their brothers and sisters until death physically separates them.<sup>33</sup> And such faithfulness always implies being open to one another. It calls for sharing. Hence, “the joys and sorrows, the concerns and successes [because they] belong to everyone ... can be shared.”<sup>34</sup>

A fraternity imbued with God’s love and the respect for one another reminds the people and the clergy that there is one thing that matters in life – the love of God and neighbour. In other words, it emphasizes that the value of one’s life is to be gauged in relationships – sound relationships with the Lord and with one another. Is this not the greatest commandment, namely to love God and one’s brothers and sisters?<sup>35</sup> Can not a community of consecrated persons be like Christ, if it manages to have the perfect love towards the Father and the others via the Spirit?

“The effectiveness of religious life depends on the quality of the fraternal life in common.”<sup>36</sup> A brotherhood in which love of God and one’s brothers and sisters is being lived and shared with one another on a daily basis via “mutual knowledge, respect, esteem and enrichment”<sup>37</sup> – never fails to become a “schola amoris”, a school of love.<sup>38</sup> Although fraternal communion is already an apostolate in itself since it is instrumental to the project of evangelization in a very direct way,<sup>39</sup> nevertheless from its nature, it is conducive to mission. A powerful mode how fraternal communion can be inserted in the world without being of the world is

32. CICLESAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 39.

33. See *The Celebration of Marriage*, Dublin 1983, 9.

34. CICLESAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, 30.

35. It is interesting to note that for the evangelist Luke the love of God and one’s neighbour are a single unified commandment. Both in the dialogue between Jesus and the lawyer as well as in the parable of the Good Samaritan which immediately followed their conversation, the thrust of the argument is that love for one’s neighbour carries the same weight as love for God. See LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON, *The Gospel of Luke (= Sacra Pagina 3)*, Minnesota 1991, 174.

36. CICLESAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 54.

37. CICLESAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ*, 29.

38. CICLESAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 25.

39. *Ibid.*, 54.

precisely by going from one place to another, and like Christ, preaching by words and deeds that the kingdom of God is near.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.1.3 *A brotherhood of mission*

As the universal Church's mission is that of evangelising the world of today, even consecrated people, via their brotherhood, can be protagonists in this work of evangelisation. They can perform this duty by "seeking constantly to improve the proclamation of the Gospel."<sup>41</sup> Three attitudes that a brotherhood of consecrated persons can interiorise in itself so that it can persuasively proclaim the Gospel to the men and women of today are: (i) proclamation; (ii) solidarity with the marginalized; and (iii) dialogue.

#### 1.1.3.1 *A Brotherhood of Gospel proclamation*

The consecrated brotherhood carries in its heart and mind the experiences of Mount Tabor and Calvary, whereby through contemplation, fraternal charity and spiritual combat,<sup>42</sup> the members can joyfully proclaim, "we have seen the Lord" (Jn 20, 25). As a result of this theophanic experience, a pneumatic brotherhood bears witness to a Christ that it has seen, heard and touched.<sup>43</sup>

One of the most valid ways of being a light to the nations is precisely by living the lifestyle of Jesus Christ himself through the evangelical counsels. This particular and eschatological witness is a "living and continuous"<sup>44</sup> sermon to those who are open to Christ's Spirit and to those who are neglecting him.<sup>45</sup> Through a consecrated brotherhood the Risen Lord shines<sup>46</sup> on those who accept him with an open heart. On the other hand on those who are still obstinate in their sin, such a brotherhood prophetically denounces their "idolatry of power, of possession and of pleasure."<sup>47</sup>

40. See Lk 8, 1.

41. POPE PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 73.

42. See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 38.

43. See 1 Jn 1, 1-3.

44. CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 60.

45. Ibid., Instruction *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 37.

46. See *ibid.*, 13.

47. CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 44. The same number goes on to explain that "there is here a convergence of "yesses" to God which unites a number of religious into one single community of life".



Through its unfailing commitment to God's Kingdom, the consecrated fraternity heralds a new heaven and a new earth where solidarity, fraternal care, justice, and understanding are a way of thinking and living. Under its wings, the marginalised really see and experience the Lord as their personal Saviour.

### 1.1.3.2 *A brotherhood for the marginalized of society*

Recognising that they are called to be “the manifestation of God's love in the world,”<sup>48</sup> consecrated persons seek to minister and accompany the rejected and least advantaged of the contemporary world via their fraternities. They are conscious that in doing so, they are not only recognising the face of Christ in the poor,<sup>49</sup> but they themselves are becoming the community of the shining face of Christ to them.<sup>50</sup>

Sustained by the tender mercy of God,<sup>51</sup> the consecrated brotherhood gives witness to its wholehearted commitment to Christ by “discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty.”<sup>52</sup> Like the Good Samaritan, it is called to minister to him by coming near him, seeing him, be moved by compassion for him, bandaging his wounds and taking care of him.<sup>53</sup> Christ's suffering and special presence<sup>54</sup> in the poor instils in the consecrated brotherhood a certain preoccupation as to how to spend one's life for him in “spreading his Gospel of love everywhere”,<sup>55</sup> especially where the poorest and neediest brothers and sisters are.

The great variety of new forms of poverty and suffering widens the horizons of presence and activity of the consecrated brotherhood. Whether working with the sick, the oppressed, the unemployed and so forth, the community is called to be a fraternity of compassion and care. Moreover, it needs not only to give to

48. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, III.

49. See CICLSAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ*, 34.

50. See Mt 17, 2.

51. See Lk 1, 78

52. CICLSAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ*, 35.

53. See Lk 10, 33-34.

54. See CICLSAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ*, 34.

55. POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Homily V Day of Consecrated Life* (2 February 2001), 5.

the poor but also to receive their witness.<sup>56</sup> One of the most viable ways of how a brotherhood can engage itself in this giving and receiving is surely by becoming a brotherhood of dialogue.

### 1.1.3.3 *A brotherhood of dialogue*

Since from its nature, the consecrated community is the result of the Trinity – the perennial example of a perfect dialogue of love – the fraternity also is essentially embedded, formed, and led to grow in a loving dialogue.<sup>57</sup> “Dialogue in charity”<sup>58</sup> is invaluable in the endeavour of weaving the bonds of communion. A Gospel fraternity cannot live without dialogue.

Dialogue is an expression of Christian love and care. It wideopens the brotherhood in a magnificent way. Such a dialogue fosters mutual understanding and trust between superiors and members. It roots the brotherhood within the particular Church, especially in the cordial and fraternal relationships of collaboration between the diocesan Bishop and the superiors.<sup>59</sup> Communion with the local prelate not only introduces the brotherhood to the sphere of evangelisation, catechesis, and parish life, but it also broadens its outlook to realise that others are present within the diocese. Dialogue stimulates the fraternity to make contacts and personally meet with other Christian Churches and Ecclesial communities, believers from other religions and people coming from the world of culture. The hospitality given by a consecrated brotherhood to Christians, non-Christians as well as to all people of good will, helps to create a life, mentality, culture and a spirituality of communion.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the best guarantor of how this can actually happen in everyday life is none other than the living experience of a consecrated fraternity. By their particular calling, consecrated people are essentially ordered to be experts of communion and dialogue.<sup>61</sup> From

56. Hence the tasks of evangelising the poor (*evangelizare pauperibus*) and be evangelised by the poor (*evangelizari a pauperibus*) go hand-in-hand. See CICLSAL, *Fraternal Life in Community*, 63.

57. John Paul II encapsulates this concept by affirming that “The consecrated life, by the very fact that it promotes the value of fraternal life, provides a privileged experience of dialogue.” *Vita Consecrata*, 74.

58. *Ibid.*, 51.

59. See *ibid.*, 49.

60. See CICLSAL, *Instruction Starting Afresh from Christ*, 30. 40.

61. See POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 10.

their lives they know that when they let their differences co-exist and converge in harmony, communion becomes possible.<sup>62</sup>

Beautiful and inspiring as it is, can the wide and deep panorama of the Church's view of consecrated life as a fraternal communion be applicable to the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood? This is exactly what the second part of this chapter of this study will seek to investigate.

## 1.2 Proposals for a Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood

The present section which attempts to give some food for reflection together with tangible proposals as to how a Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood can be what it claims to be, is going to present brotherhood as being a *koinonia*. It tries to elicit the right attitudes which truly make a brotherhood what it is supposed to be.

### 1.2.1 A Brotherhood of *koinonia*

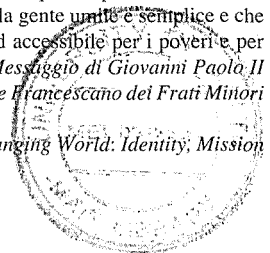
It was Pope John Paul II who has given the Capuchin Order a deep and rich understanding of its identity. In his letter addressed to the Capuchin Order on September 18, 1996, the Pope depicts the local brotherhood as being "a warmly and welcoming point of reference for the poor and for those who sincerely search for God."<sup>63</sup>

With this concise and profound statement the Pope is implying two important points that characterise the Capuchin brotherhood as *koinonia*. First, the Capuchin brotherhood, tries to represent the richness of the Church as mystery of the Trinitarian communion. Hence, the Capuchin brotherhood exists in history in order to share with humanity the gift of being and living together in the Trinitarian communion.<sup>64</sup> Second, the Capuchin fraternity can be qualified as being a home and a school of

62. See *ibid.*, 51.

63. "I frati Cappuccini potranno così portare con rinnovato entusiasmo il Vangelo anche agli uomini del nostro tempo testimoniando con la parola e con l'esempio di vita quello spirito di minorità e di condivisione che li ha resi particolarmente vicini e solidali con la gente umile e semplice e che ha fatto delle loro comunità un punto di riferimento cordiale ed accessibile per i poveri e per quanti sono sicuramente alla ricerca di Dio." POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Messaggio di Giovanni Paolo II al Reverendo Padre John Corriveau Ministro Generale dell'Ordine Franciscano dei Frati Minori Cappuccini*, 3.

64. See JOHN CORRIVEAU, *Circular Letter Gospel Brotherhood in a Changing World: Identity, Mission and Animation*, 1.2.



communion, much on the same lines as the Church herself is challenged to be so.<sup>65</sup> In this reflection and study, six attitudes are proposed with the aim of helping the Capuchin community to be an icon and a servant of the Trinitarian *koinonia*.

#### 1.2.1.1 *Prayer*

The fourth Plenary Council makes it clear that “prayer should hold first place” in the life of a fraternity.<sup>66</sup> Prayer is the centre of fraternal life. But why is prayer so essential in the life of a Capuchin brotherhood? In order to try to give an answer to this question, it is important to present some reflection on the mutual relationship between prayer and fraternity.

##### a) *Prayer and fraternity*

In the above-mentioned Plenary Council, fraternal prayer is presented as being “at the heart of [the Capuchin] brotherhood.”<sup>67</sup> The reason for the primacy of prayer within the Capuchin life is a Trinitarian one.<sup>68</sup> Since the Capuchin brotherhood, like the Church, is called and gathered together in the “unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,”<sup>69</sup> it becomes understandable that within the Capuchin life, prayer becomes the very basis of its existence. A prayerful attitude is all the more essential to let the Spirit make of the Capuchin fraternity, the brotherhood of Christ, the family of the Trinitarian God. The fourth Plenary Council, recognised this insight. As a matter of fact, it made it clear that the brothers can really live in communion with one another only when they welcome one another in prayer.<sup>70</sup>

Within a Capuchin lifestyle, fraternal relationships are only possible if there is a profound fraternal spirit of prayer. It is the same Spirit who is the author and inspirer of every Capuchin vocation. He is the one responsible for transforming fraternal prayer into a “breathing of love.”<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he who is keeping the Capuchin fraternity one in love is himself the Fraternity, i.e. Father, Son and Holy

65. See *ibid.*, 2.1.

66. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 80.

67. *Ibid.*, 15.

68. See CORRIVEAU, *The Prayer of the Brothers*, 3.2.

69. VATICAN COUNCIL II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

70. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 15.

71. Const. 45, 1.

Spirit, three persons in one God. Such a fraternal communion can only be guaranteed through prayer.<sup>72</sup>

Fraternal prayer is so highlighted within the Capuchin lifestyle that without it there is no brotherhood at all. The second Plenary Council explicitly affirms that “no community can be called Christian, and still less Franciscan, if community prayer is not a regular occurrence.”<sup>73</sup> Without a constant fraternal prayer life, the witness the brotherhood is supposed to give through its life and activity is seriously weakened.<sup>74</sup> Most of all, such a lack of fraternal prayer shows that in the brotherhood there is no integration whatsoever between “individual and community existence”,<sup>75</sup> of which prayer is certainly the most relevant expression. An authentic Franciscan Capuchin fraternity always integrates the individual within a brotherhood, with the result that he is abundantly enriched and confirmed in his vocational choice by convinced and committed individuals.

In the Capuchin way of life, prayer becomes fraternal when everybody can profoundly participate in it. This participation is beneficial to both the community and as the individual brother. Proposal 33 of the second Plenary Council, gives some suggestions as to how the brothers can share their prayer life with one another. The participation intended by this Plenary Council includes “spiritual discussions, the exchange of experiences, shared reflection on the Gospel, communal penitential and bible services, evaluation of lifestyle.”<sup>76</sup>

The brother’s life of prayer is indeed a serious task which each and every individual brother needs to be accountable for. The fourth Plenary Council puts a heavy responsibility on every brother to actively participate in each and every moment of prayer in the life of the brotherhood. Such a participation must be a qualitative as much as it is a quantitative one. Therefore, “appropriate preparation for community functions, by creating a favourable climate for prayer”<sup>77</sup> is always called for.

Being essentially fraternal, Franciscan prayer always suggests and encourages

72. Hence prayer can be seen as the intimate spiritual union between the divine (the Trinity) and the human (the Capuchin) communion.

73. I PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer* (Taizé 1973), 32.

74. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 19.

75. *Ibid.*, 40.

76. I PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer*, 33.

77. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 39.

a wider participation. As a matter of fact, it broadens the praying synaxis from the strictly fraternal community of the brothers to the inclusion of other people who are willing to praise, glorify, adore and give thanks to the Lord God. For this matter, the Constitutions are very keen to invite and challenge the brothers to “open [the] treasures [of the liturgy] to the faithful”<sup>78</sup> by urging them to celebrate the Liturgy of the Hours with the people of God.<sup>79</sup>

Franciscan life goes hand-in-hand with the integral development of the human person. This applies especially to the equal and complementary relationship between prayer and work. “Since prayer and work are equally grace”,<sup>80</sup> they are “inspired by one and the same Spirit of the Lord, [who makes them] complementary”<sup>81</sup> to one another. Due to the importance of such a balance between activity and prayer, in both the personal and fraternal life, it seems that the best way to maintain this equilibrium is that of engaging the brotherhood in a concrete and continual process of apprenticeship that lasts a lifetime.<sup>82</sup> Hence, the ministry of formation to prayer is vital and urgent.

#### b) *Prayer and formation*

Formation, inspired and guided by the life-giving Spirit,<sup>83</sup> has the duty to educate, encourage and test the brothers’ prayer life. It is its specific task to help the friars harmonise work and prayer, especially by educating them not to extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion, the driving force of every initiative that comes from above.<sup>84</sup>

From this there arises the need of formation that would hammer in, at every stage, the reality that fraternal prayer is in fact one of the essential aspects of Capuchin brotherhood.<sup>85</sup> For instance, in the postulancy,<sup>86</sup> the candidate starts to take his prayer experience seriously, mainly by being introduced to different methods of

78. Const. 47, 1.

79. See *ibid.*, 50, 3.

80. CORRIVEAU, Circular Letter *The prayer life of the brothers*, 4.4.

81. Const. 46, 5.

82. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 50.

83. *Ibid.*, 78.

84. See *ibid.*, 51; LR V, 1-2; and ER XXII, 25-26.

85. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 22.

86. The first phase of initial formation in the Franciscan Capuchin life.

prayer, especially the liturgy.<sup>87</sup> In the novitiate year, the novice is expected to deeply intensify his prayer life, particularly “liturgical, [communitarian, and] private with special periods of contemplative prayer”.<sup>88</sup> In the post-novitiate phase,<sup>89</sup> the post-novice interiorises the value of prayer by spending quite a significant time in retreats, days of recollection and, possibly, a hermitage experience. In this perspective both the formators as well as the local chapters under the direction of the guardians are called to be the main animators for an authentic and a profound fraternal spirit of prayer during initial and ongoing formation.<sup>90</sup> Since prayer is so important in weaving the spiritual bonds of communion within the Capuchin brotherhood, it is now appropriate to give some concrete proposals as to how this prayerful attitude can really build a prayerful fraternity.

c) *Some proposals for a prayerful attitude*

For a brotherhood to benefit spiritually from prayer, the following are highly recommended:

- Active and profound participation in the Church’s liturgy fashions the brotherhood in the mysteries of Christ.
- A growing familiarity with biblical prayer, particularly the Psalms, connects the fraternity more and more with the saving God of history.<sup>91</sup>
- The opening up of the brotherhood to the rich spiritual patrimony as found in the traditional forms of prayer within the Catholic Church, in different cultures as well as in the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities.
- Prayer that is shared with the faithful, with other Christians, and when possible, with non-Christians is strongly suggested.

87. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 62.

88. *Ibid.*, 64.

89. Or the common year after temporary profession whereby the candidate tries to interiorise the Capuchin values imparted at the novitiate phase via an intense experience of fraternity, prayer, work, and reflection. Although it normally lasts about a year, various provinces extend this experience to two years.

90. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 81 and Const. 142, 3.

91. See LÁZARO IRIARTE, *Figure bibliche privilegiate nell’ itinerario spirituale di san Francesco*, in *Analecta OFM Cap* 95 (1979) 240-252.

- Daily commitment to prayer, both privately and in the brotherhood.<sup>92</sup>
- Each province is to have its house of prayer or hermitage.<sup>93</sup>

Through prayer the Lord not only puts his Spirit within the brotherhood so that the latter shall live,<sup>94</sup> but also will proclaim to it that the time is fulfilled for it to repent and believe in the Good News.<sup>95</sup>

### 1.2.1.2 *Conversion*

Motivated by Francis' ideal of ongoing conversion the Capuchin brotherhood is called to engage itself in adopting a new "frame of mind and spiritual attitude, which makes [one] conscious that formation ... is never-ending, because it can and must continually be worked at, improved and perfected."<sup>96</sup> The type of conversion the fraternity is invited to embrace is one of breaking away from everything that enslaves it,<sup>97</sup> and being open instead to deep relationships with God and humanity. Inspiring as it appears, such a vision can only be accomplished within the brotherhood. It is with the brotherhood, in the brotherhood and through the brotherhood that the Franciscan Capuchin brothers can really serve Christ and his Church in the world. Therefore, the major conversion that every Capuchin friar is called to undertake in his life of penance is that of returning back to the way of the Lord – the brotherhood. It is there, where the Lord "ordain[s] his blessing, life forevermore."<sup>98</sup>

In front of this lofty ideal, the fraternity is challenged to periodically review if it is being faithful to its Gospel calling of continual conversion and renewal. The local chapter is an excellent opportunity whereby this review of life can take place. In this way the chapter will be truly promoting "formation in a fraternal manner."<sup>99</sup>

92. See II PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer*, 31.

93. Constitution 56, 1 holds that "every fraternity should be a truly prayerful fraternity. In order to achieve this it is useful, in accordance with the manifold grace of God, to promote, either in provinces or regions, fraternities of recollection and contemplation, in which brothers may devote themselves for some time to the spirit and life of prayer, as God gives them the grace."

94. See Ezk 37, 14.

95. See Mk 1, 14-15.

96. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 71.

97. See *ER XXII*, 9 and *Test* 1-3.

98. Ps 133, 3.

99. Const. 142, 3.



Also, formation can really fulfil its task, i.e., that of being a continual struggle in conformity to Christ, only via “an ongoing conversion.”<sup>100</sup>

Such a conversion touches every aspect of a person’s life, especially his intimacy. Since the heart is the seat of a person’s moral life, the fourth Plenary Council takes great care to harp on the need of conversion in the domain of sexuality and affectivity vis-à-vis the brothers. An evangelical brotherhood is to be recognised from the gradual conversion “from self-centred and possessive (infantile) love to an altruistic and self-sacrificing love capable of giving itself to others.”<sup>101</sup> Experience has always shown that a community is really a Christological one when its members love one another.<sup>102</sup>

As a result of this reciprocal love, the brotherhood is receptive to love from others. One of the signals that a Capuchin fraternity is really converting to the Lord Jesus is by learning and being close to the people. The Gospel demand of conversion “leads [the friars] to live as brothers with the people and work among them for the Kingdom of God.”<sup>103</sup> It inculcates in them a kind of conversion which demands that the friar receives from others and gives to others. This giving and receiving, which starts from the Capuchin brotherhood, has the ability to create a wider fraternity among those people who live in its midst. Led by the Gospel witness of the brothers, such a fraternity embraces each and every person, irrespective of his and her social, political, cultural and economic milieu. It transforms its members in mutual love, acceptance, understanding and compassion. On the other hand, the people themselves, by their fraternal witness to the brothers, confirm the latter in their struggle to live their life of penance in brotherhood with much vigour and commitment.

From a witness of a fraternal life imbued with conversion, the Capuchin brotherhood can authoritatively and persuasively proclaim it to others via its word. Their preaching – since it has been severely tested, corrected and changed by fraternal life and restored back to God’s grace by the healing power of the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation – can transfigure people’s daily hardships, dryness, anxieties and trials of life.<sup>104</sup> Its powerful message can also reach and convert

100. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 1.

101. *Ibid.*, 52.

102. As Christ himself told to his disciples “by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13, 35).

103. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 47.

104. See II PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer*, 16.

“persons in positions of power and rulers of peoples.”<sup>105</sup> It has the ability to inculcate in them the sense of justice and the obligation of safeguarding peace.

Since the Gospel’s call to conversion is part and parcel of the Capuchin brotherhood’s being and apostolate it would be interesting to give some suggestions as to how this can be lived in practice.

a) *Proposals for a life of conversion*

A Capuchin life led and fostered by the spirit of conversion and penance would motivate the brothers to:

- Renounce themselves through the exercise of charitable obedience in order to let the fraternity change them.<sup>106</sup>
- Accept the invitations to conversion that are directed to the brotherhood by the Church, particularly in specific times of her liturgical year which from their nature induce to conversion and renewal.
- Adopt the explicit methods proposed by the Constitutions, especially, fraternal correction and fasting.<sup>107</sup>
- Joyfully embrace the hardships and persecution that might befall them due to their special consecration to God, their Gospel proclamation, their endeavours to achieve justice and peace and so forth.<sup>108</sup>
- Accept the repercussions which consecrated vows, in particular that of obedience, might bring on them, also when they are painful and become very demanding to live out.
- Interiorise the challenges of life as they are manifested in work, sickness, poor food, bad climate, and so forth.<sup>109</sup>
- Share with the poor their life conditions as well as to encounter the “lepers” of the present age, in other words, those who are excluded and the deprived of society.<sup>110</sup>
- Look for new exterior modes appropriate to the local situation which simultaneously means a witness and a rift with the world.

105. Const. 145, 4.

106. See *LR X*, 2-3 and *Acm III*.

107. See Const. 105, 2 and Const. 103, 4.

108. See *ICel 29*.

109. See *LR V* and *X*.

110. See *Test 1-2*.

- Denounce, via the Order's Peace and Justice Commissions any use of violence, terrorism, military solutions in national and international conflicts, torture and death penalty, both locally and internationally.<sup>111</sup>

The Capuchin way of life, empowered by the Gospel, has always shown that the best way to concretely and effectively interiorise an attitude of conversion, is precisely via a “chaste and generous love.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, real penance and conversion are embodied in loving acts, arising from a deep reciprocal and fraternal love.

### 1.2.1.3 *Fraternal love*

The major Capuchin documents deal with the greatest virtue and expression of brotherhood, that is love (*caritas*), under six dimensions: (i) love for God; (ii) love for neighbour; (iii) love and the apostolate; (iv) love and formation; (v) penance and charity; and (vi) a loving and prophetic presence in the world. It is important to see how these six aspects are intimately related to Capuchin fraternal life.

#### a) *Love for God*

Capuchin fraternal love must necessarily be a witness of the Father's love for everyone.<sup>113</sup> In the eucharistic sacrifice, the Father is glorified both through his Son, the perfect sacrifice of praise and by “the bond of unity”<sup>114</sup> and love which unite the brothers with God and with one another. Hence, the daily celebration of the Eucharist creates within a brotherhood a “breath of love”<sup>115</sup> as well as “the spirit of prayer and devotion”<sup>116</sup> for the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. Such a filial love for God, which makes the Capuchin brotherhood the fraternity of Trinitarian communion, is automatically extended to all his children, who through Christ become for the Capuchins their brothers and sisters.

111. See V PCO, *Our Prophetic Presence in the World: Apostolic Life and Activity*, 96.

112. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 6.

113. II PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer*, 8.

114. *Ibid.*, 37.

115. *Ibid.*, 6.

116. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 15.

b) *Love for neighbour*

Since God loved the Capuchins so much, the latter also ought to love one another and their neighbour.<sup>117</sup> Genuine fraternal love for one's brother and sister means "incarnating ... the Father's love for [humanity]".<sup>118</sup> Thus, for Saint Francis a real evangelising brotherhood always implants the Gospel in the people's hearts by "being meek, peaceful, fraternal and genuinely Christian[]";<sup>119</sup> hence, a brotherhood of fraternal love. Such a love needs to be started and witnessed to, first of all, in the fraternity itself. The friars are called to show great "mutual affection"<sup>120</sup> and esteem for one another. Perhaps one of the most intense moments whereby real fraternal love is shared amongst the brothers is when they are capable of sharing their spiritual experiences with one another. It is there where they really intensify their commitment to be spiritual brothers to each other.

Obviously love is never bound to stay enclosed within itself. From its nature, it is ordered to be open to others. Therefore, love and apostolate go hand in hand.

c) *Love and apostolate*

The Capuchin vocation to be a brother inserted in a fraternity of brothers makes of the Capuchin a builder and an agent of communion. In a world where struggle for power is a top feature on the agenda of many sectors of society, the Capuchin brotherhood's typical witness of contributing for and creating an atmosphere of love, justice, peace and evangelical joy, becomes all the more urgent and essential.

The best way how the Capuchin fraternity can answer its call of being a builder of communion is precisely by inserting itself among the people, especially the poor. Empowered by a deep and passionate love for God and his people,<sup>121</sup> the brotherhood<sup>122</sup> proclaims the Good News of salvation via its way of life, preaching,

117. See 1 Jn 4, 11.

118. III PCO, *Our Missionary Life and Activity*, 12.

119. *Ibid.*, 13.

120. II PCO, *Our Life and Practice of Prayer*, 14.

121. See Const. 154, 1. This also explains the basic motivation behind any apostolic activity that the brotherhood engages in, namely, "the exercise of love for God and people".

122. The fourth Plenary Council is very explicit in pointing out that in taking their place among the people, the brothers are to do so, "not so much as individuals but rather as a fraternity," IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 47.

missionary activity and practical service to those in the greatest need.<sup>123</sup> What catches the eye of the beholder is the fact that the Capuchin apostolate always starts from, moves on, and ends in fraternity. It is always directed to creating and fostering communion between God and his people, the evangelisers and the evangelised and the latter amongst themselves. By reason of having the same vocation, “the brothers are equal,”<sup>124</sup> both in rights and in duties. Their equality stimulates them to give themselves to one another unreservedly. Obviously, formation has much to contribute in this area.

#### d) *Love and formation*

Initial formation is supposed to give a good and solid grounding to the basic attitude of fraternal love. As a matter of fact, heavy responsibility is laid upon the formators’ shoulders to make sure that the brothers in initial formation are interiorising charity. By their own input and especially by their powerful example, the formators help the candidates to the Capuchin life to combat and defeat their old self with its sinful passions and desires so that with the Risen Lord they put on the new and transfigured man, the man imbued with “chaste and generous love”.<sup>125</sup> That is why great care needs to be taken in both initial and ongoing formation, to provide the most effective means for educating one’s emotional maturity, especially in the area of affectivity and sexuality. A healthy and balanced formation always educates and accompanies the person to travel the gradual road from egoism to self-giving love in and for the community.<sup>126</sup>

Such a maturity, which takes a lifetime, opens the brothers more to “the sweetness, joy and goodness”<sup>127</sup> of the love of God. It is in such a powerful and transfigurative experience that the brothers can actually start a process of dying to self, of having nothing of “their own” to embrace, except Jesus in one another. In God made man, their human relationships are restored and redeemed because they are divinised in Christ, thus becoming more human and fraternal. In this way they continually deepen, interiorise and integrate in themselves and one another the spirit and value of fraternal love. As it turns out, fraternal charity is not only an apostolate of the brothers but also their mode of continually conforming to Christ, i.e. their life of penance.

123. See *ibid.*, 36.

124. Const. 84, 3.

125. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 6.

126. See *ibid.*, 52.

127. *Ibid.*, 56.

e) *Penance and charity*

Penance in the Capuchin life has another name – poverty. It is one of the basic attitudes for being a Franciscan Capuchin. Real poverty is one that opens the brotherhood to a “loving solidarity with others”.<sup>128</sup> Thus understood, penance is essentially fraternal. It is incarnated in concrete loving actions of being and walking with others. Therefore, the thermometer of penance or poverty is never austerity but fraternal love. It is the latter which is to give fraternity its direction.

The brothers’ life of penance should be one of the items of a local chapter where an objective, frank and charitable review of fraternal life is to be conducted. Superiors are to do their best to instil in their brothers a spiritual eagerness and yearning for a type of individual as well as fraternal penance that opens them more to Christ, one another, and the poor and the marginalised who live in their midst. Such a life of fraternal penance, understood as solidarity, necessarily makes of the brotherhood a loving and a prophetic presence in the world.

f) *A loving and a prophetic presence in the world*

Imbued as it is with the love of God and the neighbour, the Capuchin fraternity becomes a living memory of the self-sacrificial love of Christ for his own. For the Capuchin brothers, their lived fraternity is their specific prophetic witness and work of evangelisation.<sup>129</sup> The brothers’ loving presence for the people of today originates from a deep love for Christ Crucified, whose living memory is present in the suffering and the neglected of society. Hence, the poor, the humble and the little are the ones who make the presence of Capuchin brotherhood in the world evangelical and meaningful. They “christify” their fraternity.

When the brotherhood is christified, its efforts become christified too. In themselves the efforts become the fruit of a new being who is immersed in the paschal mystery of Christ. For instance, if the brothers are working for peace, their struggles for it become the struggles of the Lord, who is peace.<sup>130</sup> It is the Lord Jesus who gives himself as a gift of peace via the brothers to the world.<sup>131</sup> Therefore,

128. *Ibid.*, 44.

129. See V PCO, *Our Prophetic Presence in the World: Apostolic Life and Activity*, 21.

130. Saint Paul declares in his letter to the Ephesians that “he (Christ) is our peace” (Ep 2, 14).

131. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 64.

through its loving and prophetic witness, the Capuchin brotherhood acts as a living and eloquent reminder “that it is possible to live in this world [loving] fraternal relationships based on justice and love”.<sup>132</sup> In order to prove how this is possible, some concrete proposals are now given.

g) *Some proposals for loving one another*

The Capuchin brothers can be truly called brothers if they love one another wholeheartedly. Such a fraternal love can really become flesh when the brothers:

- Generate in the brotherhood milieu a spirit of familiarity, simplicity and joy, where each member can easily develop at his own pace.<sup>133</sup>
- Promote reciprocal trust, understanding and respect for each other.<sup>134</sup>
- Show their needs to each other with simplicity.<sup>135</sup>
- Generously offer their abilities for the benefit of the fraternity.<sup>136</sup>
- Exercise loving obedience and fraternal correction through a constant struggle for conversion.<sup>137</sup>
- Sustain each other in periods of tribulation or disappointment.<sup>138</sup>

Fraternal love is a love between equals. No better Capuchin attitude can express this reality other than minority.

#### 1.2.1.4 Minority

Minority unfolds the kenotic essence of the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood. The latter’s minority is the result of the *kenosis* of the Son of God. By “empt[ying] himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness”,<sup>139</sup> Christ became

132. V PCO, *Our Prophetic Presence in the World*, 102.

133. Pope Paul VI said in his letter to the Minister General: “Franciscalis vitae forma, quae initio floruit, et nominatim priores communitates capuccinae spiritu verae fraternitatis et familiae fuerunt insignes. quo perfecta unitas cordium et personarum communio reapse habetur” (“The type of Franciscan life which flourished from the beginning, and the first Capuchin communities, were especially outstanding for their fraternal and family spirit, which really brings about perfect unity of hearts and communion of persons”), POPE PAUL VI, *Litterae Pauli VI Occasione Capituli Generalis 1974* (20 August 1974).

134. See *ER* V, 2-6; VII, 15; XI; *Adm* VIII; and *LR* X, 7.

135. See *LR* VI, 8 and *ER* IX, 10.

136. See *ibid.*, 7, 15 and *Adm* XVII and XIX.

137. See *ER* V, 5-8. 13-16; *LR* X, 1-7 and *Adm* XXII.

138. See *ER* V, 5-8; *LR* VII; and *Adm* XVIII and XXIV.

139. Ph 2, 7.

our lesser brother. Two ways how minority is to be seen within the Franciscan Capuchin life are: (i) minority and the friars minor and (ii) minority and the apostolate.

a) *Minority and the friars minor*

As their very name suggests, Order of the Capuchin Friars Minor, the brothers are *minores*, i.e. lesser brothers. To be a lesser brother is to be a brother full of compassion for everyone and everything, as Saint Francis was. Therefore, the best way how the Capuchin Order can be a brotherhood of minority is by starting a personal and a fraternal conversion to compassion.<sup>140</sup> It is in being and living with the others with compassion, that the truly Capuchin brotherhood can be authentically identified as minor.

In the Capuchin way of life, any fraternal care and solicitude for others, has to start from one's family – the brotherhood. With much insistence and clarity, the Constitutions are careful not to exempt anyone from showing his fraternal care and co-responsibility by giving himself to the brothers through daily domestic work. "All should help one another according to the gifts each one received, including the performance of daily household duties."<sup>141</sup> Since work is a grace, it conduces to communion and solidarity in love. Therefore, it necessarily leads to a brotherhood in minority.

The very solidarity that the brothers show to one another automatically reminds them that they form together the poor brotherhood of *minores*. Minority opens the brothers' hearts and minds to see and consider each other as brothers, a brotherhood of equals. It stimulates them to live and work with and for each other. And, most of all, minority weaves the bonds of their fraternal *koinonia* by making them dependent on one another.

When a brotherhood is imbued with fraternal caring and compassion, it spontaneously listens to the cry of the poor and the oppressed, sets out and goes with haste<sup>142</sup> to meet them where they are. Thus, it becomes apostolic.

140. See CORRIVEAU, Circular Letter '*That excessive Love*'. A reflection on Francis' experience of the *Crucified*, 8.1.

141. Const. 84, 6

142. See Lk 1, 39.



b) *Minority and apostolic life*

Being conscious of the Master's admonition that "you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish,"<sup>143</sup> the Capuchin brotherhood is encouraged to widen its horizons and go out to meet "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame"<sup>144</sup> of our time.

The poor and the oppressed are the people with whom the Capuchins are called to spend their life and activity with. It is thanks to them that the Capuchins have their identity and can be recognised as truly "lesser brothers".<sup>145</sup> Minority facilitates communion. Authentic Franciscan minority always creates solidarity and brotherhood with the least fortunate. It implants the Gospel of communion with God and the suffering people through the promotion of a new humanity, based on fraternity and solidarity for every brother and sister. Imbued with the compassion of Christ, Capuchin minority divinises and makes humanity more human; precisely by incarnating the lifestyle of the Son of God who became a brother of all and for all. It shows that a true brotherhood can only manage to give witness of what it is, solely by leading a life of humble presence and service for the afflicted.

Minority teaches the brotherhood to walk together with and accompany the suffering. Being evangelised by the kenotic attitude of Christ, the Capuchin fraternity is automatically open to be with, feel and listen to the poor. The third Plenary Council of the Order emphasised a lot about the need for listening. As it turns out, listening is one of the requirements of minority. It is an important vehicle in reaching others where they stand.<sup>146</sup> Listening makes of the brotherhood a school of interiorisation of human and transcendental values, imparted by God through the people the fraternity is ministering to.<sup>147</sup> Hence, minority makes of the Capuchin apostolate an opportunity for growth and improvement in the different dimensions of life. Most of all it sensibilises the brotherhood to be self-responsible and accountable for its way of living and ministering.

143. Mk 14, 7.

144. Lk 14, 21.

145. See IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 9.

146. The sixth Plenary Council brings this point home very well when it explicitly encouraged the Capuchin brothers to be good listeners to the people especially the poor. "Bearing in mind the example of Francis, who could not bear to see someone poorer than himself, we should commit ourselves to listening to people, particularly those who are excluded from sharing the benefits of the global economy." VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 28.

147. See III PCO, *Our Missionary Life and Activity*, 13.

Drawn by the devoted love and respect of Saint Francis for the Church, the Capuchin brotherhood lives its minority in a fraternal attitude in her dealings with the ecclesial community. Encouraged by the example of the Poverello, the brotherhood seeks ways and means of collaboration with the local Church. Collaboration becomes new expression of minority. It makes the brothers listeners, engaging in dialogue, obedient to the promptings of the Spirit as shown in the circumstances of Church life and available for every kind of service to the people of God.<sup>148</sup>

In the Franciscan Capuchin mentality, minority also stands for working together. Since its entire apostolic activity knows its alfa and its omega in the brotherhood, each and every individual apostolate is essentially the property of the fraternity. The more its projects become fraternal, and therefore inclusive and participative, the greater is the chance of creating communion. The resulting effect is that the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood becomes a fraternity of collegiality, whereby every friar shares responsibility in its life and activity. Collegiality leaves an indelible character on the Franciscan Capuchin charism of brotherhood. It is through a responsible and prayerful collegiality that the Spirit can change the heart and mind of the Capuchin community, thus rendering it more equal, humble and ready to serve with great generosity. Hence, in such a fraternity, no brother can appropriate any office or project for himself. On the contrary, every private initiative becomes necessarily anointed by fraternity.

Since minority is the soul of the Capuchin charism of brotherhood, it is apt to give some suggestions as to how the fraternity can concretely be minor.

c) *Some proposals on how to be minor*

A Capuchin fraternity can live as a brotherhood in Gospel minority when:

- Any brother can be given the opportunity to be installed and elected to the different offices within the local brotherhood, the Province and the Order.<sup>149</sup>

148. See *ibid.*, 18.

149. See Const. 84, 5.

- Authority exhorts the fraternity to formulate a fraternal programme as a means to enhance the friars' human and spiritual development. Such a plan is facilitated and supervised by the guardian.<sup>150</sup>
- The brothers consider and accept each other as a complementary gift of God to one another.
- Fraternal collegiality is exercised. The latter ranges from sharing in decision making processes to give a helping hand in the daily running and upkeep of Capuchin houses.<sup>151</sup>
- The attitude of teamwork is promoted and fostered in all sectors of the Order both by the competent superiors as well as by the fraternity.
- Its members serve the poor with their own hands.<sup>152</sup>
- In their choice and discernment for the apostolate, the brothers are to give priority to those areas of activity which are the least privileged and which bring them closer to the poor and the marginalised.

To transform the world with the “aroma of Christ,”<sup>153</sup> minority needs to be embodied in daily actions of love. The attitude which incarnates the kenotic spirit that imbues a brotherhood of lesser brothers is surely that of solidarity.

#### 1.2.1.5 *Solidarity*

The attitude of solidarity inspires and cultivates within the friars a strong and continuous dedication to be committed to the common good of everyone. It furnishes their brotherhood with relationships that are grounded on fraternal communion and interdependence.<sup>154</sup>

In the Franciscan Capuchin mentality, solidarity means the sharing of oneself as a gift in a loving and equal relationship with others. It is this sharing of who one is, rather than of what one has, that makes Franciscan solidarity unique. When the brothers accept each other as brothers of the same Lord, they interact with one another fraternally. The more united they become to each other the more they feel the need to walk together.<sup>155</sup> In this way, a Capuchin brotherhood has interiorised

150. See VII PCO, *Our Fraternal Life in Minority* (Assisi 2004), 8.

151. See *ibid.*, 9.

152. See VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 9.

153. 2 Co 2, 15.

154. See VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 21.

155. See *ibid.*, 27.

solidarity. As the fraternity starts living for Christ who is present in every brother, its *modus vivendi* of sharing, caring and communion becomes the way of dealing with the people as well. Since the Capuchin brotherhood knows that “communion begets communion,”<sup>156</sup> its most effective manner to be an authentic messenger of the Gospel message is to share its fraternal solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalised who live in its midst.

Inspired by the example of the Son of God, who inculcated himself with humanity by becoming their lesser brother, the Capuchin brothers, in the same manner, are challenged to inculcate themselves with Christ who is suffering in the poor by becoming their lesser brothers. In other words, minority facilitates and effects solidarity.

In washing the feet of the poor the Capuchin fraternity experiences the healing and the joy that a disinterested love in solidarity gives. Such a brotherhood finds itself at home by being and living with the poor. The latter by their simplicity and openness humanise the brothers. They make them discover and enhance their capacity to love and show compassion. In this sense, the poor, as icons of the crucified Christ, become – in a sense – their word of God and their Eucharist. Also, in their ministry of sharing, caring and building communion in solidarity, the Capuchins are serving Christ himself. “Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”<sup>157</sup>

From its contact with the poor the Capuchin fraternity makes its own the words Peter said before the transfigured Christ: “... It is good for us to be here.”<sup>158</sup> Yes, indeed, it is good that the brothers be with the marginalised and the oppressed, that they open their houses and share what they are and have with them. The poor endow the brothers with an ongoing discovery of their presence, ministry and formation. The poor teach the brothers what it means to be a lesser brother and to exercise a solidarity that is person-oriented and relational. In other words, the poor teach the friars how to love them.

Since the character of their relationships with everyone is equality, the Capuchin brothers can easily understand, empathise and live intensely their relationships with

156. POPE JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 46.

157. Mt 25, 40.

158. Mt 17, 4.

themselves and with others. Franciscan solidarity tunes their hearts and minds to the cry of those who suffer injustice and are unjustly excluded from the global economy. It names the poor by name as brothers and sisters, and gives them the full human dignity which they have by virtue of being created in the image of God. Such a solidarity discloses the warming and fraternal heart of God who visits and is present with his people as they journey in this valley of tears towards their eternal home. Thus, the Capuchin brotherhood, through its evangelical, compassionate and personal encounter with the poor, reminds those who have eyes to see and ears to listen, that a global solidarity that is person-centred can bring about a new liberating social order.<sup>159</sup>

Gospel solidarity makes the Capuchin brotherhood a fraternity of interdependence.<sup>160</sup> It opens up the treasures of affection, solicitude and communion to all. It liberates and redeems relationships by submissive humility in love. Imbued and motivated by Christ's solidarity for sinful humanity, Capuchin solidarity transforms abusive and oppressive relationships into ones of humility, fraternity, humanity, equality, intimacy, co-responsibility, justice, compassion, love and redemption.

The Capuchin solidarity of interdependence and brotherhood embraces the whole creation. It makes the Capuchins brothers to all peoples and all creatures.<sup>161</sup> Here are some suggestions of how the brothers can live this dimension as a fraternity.

a) *Some proposals on how to live solidarity in fraternity*

A Franciscan Capuchin solidarity requires from the brothers to:

- Promote solidarity from fraternity to fraternity.<sup>162</sup>
- To meet their personal needs and ministries in manners that fit their own culture and people.<sup>163</sup>
- Make their petition for help to the International Economic Solidarity Office of the Order only after they have tried to do their best to get the needed funds through their work and the alms of their people.<sup>164</sup>

159. See VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 22.

160. See *ibid.*, 21.

161. See V PCO, *Our Prophetic Presence in the World*, 28

162. See VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 24a

163. See *ibid.*, 24c.

164. See *ibid.*, 24d.

- Share personnel between provincial and inter-provincial fraternities as well as with circumscriptions which are decreasing in number or with others who are still in a phase of development. In this sharing, fully prepared personnel is always needed in initial formation programmes.
- Fraternally organise social and charitable structures with the active assistance of lay staff prepared in principles of solidarity. The latter are to administer the temporal goods whereas the brothers undertake the spiritual direction.<sup>165</sup>
- Make sure that the members of the Solidarity Commissions of the Order come from both the contributing and the receiving Provinces.<sup>166</sup>
- Be committed to peace, justice and the integrity of creation, utilising the materials of “mother earth” carefully, looking after the least ones with fraternal responsibility, courageously speaking out for the voiceless as well as protecting future generations.<sup>167</sup>

Franciscan solidarity deepens communion and creates trust in one another. It paves the way for dialogue.

#### 1.2.1.6 *Dialogue*

Dialogue is the highest expression of fraternal intimacy. Thanks to dialogue the brothers get to know each other intimately. Within the Capuchin brotherhood, dialogue happens in three ways: (i) Dialogue in fraternal life; (ii) Dialogue in formation; and (iii) Dialogue in apostolate.

##### a) *Dialogue in fraternal life*

Franciscan dialogue gives a heart to the brothers for listening and sharing with each other. Dialogue makes the brothers open their treasure chests of life, and offer to one another the gifts of their fraternal experiences.<sup>168</sup> A powerful sign that the brothers are authentically growing in their relationships to each other is when they venture to share their spiritual life in fraternity. Capuchin experience has shown that “whenever [the] brothers have taken this risk, they have been met with astonishing

165. See Const. 71, 9.

166. See VI PCO, *Living Poverty in Brotherhood*, 24h.

167. See V PCO, *Our Prophetic Presence in the World: Apostolic Life and Activity*, 65.

168. See Mt 2, 11 and Const. 84, 2.

generosity, compassion and support from one another.”<sup>169</sup> Such a loving response from the fraternity would surely encourage the brothers that they too might possess that contemplative gaze that is able to put back Christ in a world that keeps rejecting his loving and salvific presence.<sup>170</sup>

This kind of fraternal understanding and sincere esteem is to accompany the brothers throughout their life, especially in moments of deep fraternal meaning. A particular moment whereby the brotherhood is extremely urged to be caring and sensible is the local chapter. Constitution number 142 lays a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of the local chapter and the guardian as its custodian, to make sure that a fraternal atmosphere permeates the discussions that need to take place, particularly “on all matters that concern the life of the fraternity.”<sup>171</sup> Hence, the ministers are not only not exempted from dialoguing with their brothers but also, in the spirit of the Constitutions, they are to take the first step and start dialoguing with their confreres as well as consider seriously their suggestions.<sup>172</sup>

Since dialogue is an essential dynamic in the Capuchin life, it is surely the task of formation to help the brothers interiorise it in their lives.

#### b) *Dialogue in formation*

In the Capuchin brotherhood, dialogue serves as a pedagogical means for the transmission of sound Capuchin values.<sup>173</sup> When speaking about ongoing formation, the fourth Plenary Council makes it clear that dialogue does strengthen the Franciscan Capuchin charism of brotherhood. A sensible and well-planned ongoing formation does make “dialogue among the different generations easier and aiding in overcoming some of the unavoidable problems and crises arising with advancing age.”<sup>174</sup> To put it short, dialogue is one of the principal means for ongoing formation. It is one of the essential requirements for an effective formation process

169. CORRIVEAU, Circular Letter, *Prayer*, 5.2

170. *Ibid.*, 5.3.

171. Const. 142, 3. According to the same number of this constitution the issues which need to be dealt with in a local chapter are “the fostering of prayer life, the observance of poverty and the promotion of formation in a fraternal manner”.

172. *Ibid.*, 157, 4.

173. Proposal 51 of the first Plenary Council of the order sees dialogue as an instrument for imparting the value of poverty. See I PCO, *Our Life in Fraternity and Poverty*, 51.

174. IV PCO, *Formation Guidelines*, 70.

which tends to encourage and enable the building up of a fraternity of brothers.<sup>175</sup> Dialogue facilitates the friars to freely share their joys and sorrows with one another; thus developing a deep and committed affective life among themselves.<sup>176</sup> Since the fundamental technique of formation in the Capuchin Order is brotherhood, a productive and caring dialogue between the younger and older friars does not only inspire the brothers' fraternal living with one another but also makes them available for mission.

c) *Dialogue in apostolate*

The Capuchin apostolic life revolves around the dialogical relationship of friendship which Jesus shared with "his own". "I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."<sup>177</sup> The Capuchin brotherhood is imbued and transformed in the close intimacy of Jesus with his disciples. As a fraternity of Christ's intimacy, it dialogues fraternally with everyone, with the result that others open their hearts in return.<sup>178</sup> Motivated by the example of the *Poverello*, who considered himself the lesser brother of everybody, the Capuchin fraternity is called to conduct its apostolic and missionary activity in a spirit of an open, appreciating, hospitable, admiring and enriching dialogue.<sup>179</sup> Hence, the Capuchin perception of apostolate renders the Capuchin fraternity as the brotherhood of dialogue. Educated and sustained by Gospel minority, a Capuchin brotherhood can easily and effectively help the people it serves, via a humble, fraternal, caring and challenging dialogue with them. The brotherhood's divine sensitivity for the integral human development of its brothers and sisters stimulates it to draw up some proposals and tries to put them into practice.

d) *Some proposals for a fraternity of dialogue*

A Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood really becomes a fraternity of dialogue when:

- The local chapter – habitually celebrated and permeated by a loving, responsible, obedient and caring dialogue – becomes a fraternal and warm

175. See *ibid.*, 77.

176. See *ibid.*, 55.

177. Jn 15, 15.

178. See III PCO, *Our Missionary Life and Activity*, 13.

179. See *ibid.*, 28.



environment where everybody listens humbly and attentively to each other; allows the full participation of every member of the fraternity in order that new modes for deepening and fostering evangelical communion are found; evaluates periodically the power structures inherent in any brotherhood; and urges for a spirit of itinerancy.<sup>180</sup>

- Its Ministers exercise authority to build up a brotherhood weaved with deep and intimate fraternal relationships of the brothers among themselves. Thus, Capuchin Ministers are strongly urged to create participative models of authority, whereby all the brothers have a say, before deciding on thorny issues that have serious consequences on the future of a local fraternity, a Province, or on the Order itself.<sup>181</sup>
- The brothers, with prudence and charitable heart, open their houses and fraternities to the people. Old friaries with great historical and artistic value are to be well taken care of and also used as places of dialogue between faith and culture. Furthermore, the brothers are to be made aware that pastoral tourism is one of the important expressions of the new evangelisation.
- In the Peace, Justice and Ecology Commission of every Province, a sub-committee is created with the intent of animating the whole Province on the importance of dialogue in Capuchin life. The suggestions and activities organized by this committee are to be included in the ongoing formation programme. Also, the same Commission is to critically collaborate with non-Catholic, non-Christian, and secular groups which work for the caring and respect of the integrity of creation.
- The Capuchin General Definitory enters into a fraternal and trusting dialogue with the Capuchin Historical Institute, the Pontifical Athenaeum known as the “Antonianum”, and with the General Minister and Definitory of the Friars Minor, to facilitate the valuable service of the Franciscan Institute of Spirituality in preparing the formation personnel of the Capuchin Order as well as to be a resource for research and study on the living of the Capuchin charism in today’s world.<sup>182</sup>
- Different brothers from Catholic and Anglican Franciscan families of the first Order form a mixed fraternity at the International Franciscan Centre

180. See Const. 142, 2-4 and VII PCO, *Our Fraternal Life in Minority*, 11.

181. See *ibid.*, 19.

182. See CORRIVEAU, *Brotherhood in a Changing World*, 7.4.

for Dialogue in Assisi. Such a fraternity would really foster Franciscan and ecclesial ecumenism, inter-religious and inter-racial dialogue.<sup>183</sup>

## Conclusion

The best way how the Franciscan Capuchin brotherhood stands as an example and a faithful witness of the consecrated communion to the people of our time is precisely by its capacity to make its members real brothers to one another and to the entire cosmos they are living in. The brothers are going to be judged by the Lord in the same way they behaved with him in their brothers. Hence, the love for one's brother is the only criterion for one's eternal life in Christ. By incarnating the gospel of love into concrete gestures of fraternal love, a real Capuchin brotherhood opens its heart and mind to Christ, the love of the Father to humanity. It is Christ himself who is the power and the source for this vigour and correspondence between the spoken and the lived word. It is in, with and through Christ that the spoken word is anointed, empowered and transformed into a word of authority, hence becoming a lived word. A life which incarnates Christ's love into actions of fraternal care and commitment is the best witness and vocational promotion the Capuchin brotherhood can ever make. By its powerful example it is reminding all people of good will that it is possible today to love till the point of giving one's life for one's brother or sister, the living image of Christ. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."<sup>184</sup> Also, a mature Capuchin brotherhood is one that accepts the challenge of fraternal correction and gives it at the right time and at the right place to the brothers who need it. A fraternal correction done with great love and care has the power to gradually change the brotherhood into one "without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind – yes, so that [it] may be holy and without blemish".<sup>185</sup> Are not deep communion with Christ, fraternal love in action and a caring brotherly correction the constituents of a healthy ecclesial communion?

Kunvent tal-Kapuċċini

Misrah Lourdes

San Gwann SĠN 04

183. See MARIO ATTARD, *Centru Internazzjonali Franġiskan għad-Djalogu*, in *Dawl Franġiskan*, 236, San Gwann 2004, 12–13.

184. n 15, 13.

185. Ep 5, 27.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### Abbreviations in the footnotes

#### *Writings of Saint Francis*

- Adm*     *The Admonitions*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, I, New York – London – Manila 1999, 128-137.
- ER*       *The Earlier Rule*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, I, New York – London – Manila 1999, 63-86.
- LR*       *The Later Rule*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, I, New York – London – Manila 1999, 99-106.
- Test*     *The Testament*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, I, New York – London – Manila 1999, 124-127.

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- 2 Cel*     *The Second Life of Saint Francis by Thomas of Celano*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, I, New York – London – Manila 1999, 258-287. *Fonti Francescane. Scritti e biografie di san Francesco d'Assisi. Cronache e altre testimonianze del primo secolo Franceseano. Scritti e biografie di santa Chiara d'Assisi*, a cura di Ernesto Caroli, I ristampa Padova <sup>4</sup>1996, 553-732.
- ChrTE*     *The Chronicle of Thomas of Eccleston*, in *Fonti Francescane. Scritti e biografie di san Francesco d'Assisi. Cronache e altre testimonianze del primo secolo Franceseano. Scritti e biografie di santa Chiara d'Assisi*, a cura di Ernesto Caroli, I ristampa Padova <sup>4</sup>1996, 2015-2089.
- LMj*       *The Major Legend by Saint Bonaventure*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis J. Armstrong – J.A. Wayne – William J. Short, II, New York – London – Manila 1999, 525-649. *Fonti Francescane. Scritti e biografie di san Francesco d'Assisi. Cronache e altre testimonianze del primo secolo Franceseano. Scritti e biografie*

*di santa Chiara d'Assisi*, a cura di Ernesto Caroli, I ristampa Padova  
 41996, 833-1014.

### Some Capuchin Documents

Const	Constitution
I PCO	The First Plenary Council of the Order at Quito in 1971
II PCO	The Second Plenary Council of the Order at Taizé in 1973
III PCO	The Third Plenary Council of the Order at Mattli in 1978
IV PCO	The Fourth Plenary Council of the Order at Rome in 1981
V PCO	The Fifth Plenary Council of the Order at Garibaldi in 1986
VI PCO	The Sixth Plenary Council of the Order at Assisi in 1998
VII PCO	The Seventh Plenary Council of the Order at Assisi in 2004

### Other Abbreviations

CICLSAL Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of  
 Apostolic Life

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